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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR GRABER'S INTRODUCTORY CALL ON PRIME
MINISTER TOPOLANEK

REF: PRAGUE 1322

Classified By: AMB RICHARD GRABER FOR REASONS 1.4 B, D

1. (C) SUMMARY: During the Ambassador's October 23 introductory call, Czech Prime Minister Mirek TopolaneK (ODS) expressed his satisfaction with bilateral cooperation in the fields of security and democracy promotion, his concern about energy security in Europe, and his hope that the Ambassador will get personally involved in the lobbying campaign to bring new EU states into the Visa Waiver Program. TopolaneK, fresh from his party's impressive victory in the recent Senate and local elections (reftel), was unable to predict how the win might impact the formation of the next government, or how long his government, which resigned October 11 after failing a vote of confidence, would continue to rule. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) CZECH SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY PROMOTION: Prime Minister and Chairman of the Civic Democrats (ODS) Mirek TopolaneK said that the Czech Republic had worked hard and successfully with the United States to transform regimes and promote human rights in places such as Belarus, Burma, and Cuba. TopolaneK argued that the Czechs have the capacity and empathy to work with countries undergoing transformation and would, therefore, like to increase Czech cooperation with the U.S. in this field. TopolaneK was candid in admitting that this will mean, to a large extent, U.S. funding for projects carried out by the Czechs, such as the training of journalists or NGO in Iraq. TopolaneK said that he personally, and his party in general, are very active in democracy promotion, both domestically and at the EU level, and assured the Ambassador of his continuing support on this issue.

3. (C) TERRORISM AND SECURITY: TopolaneK said that he had followed President Bush's speech on the anniversary of 9/11 and that he felt the points in the speech had meaning for Czechs as well. TopolaneK spoke of shared threats, such as terrorism, North Korea, and proliferation. He said his government shares the same view as the U.S. administration on these issues, and continues to support deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq. His government has just submitted a draft bill to parliament to increase the number of troops in those missions, within the framework cooperation with NATO and the U.S. TopolaneK said ODS would like to see a small unit in Lebanon, but pointed out that the Czech Republic cannot carry out any more foreign missions just now. He explained it was not just a question of money, but also of personnel and equipment. He also said the Czechs are looking at the creation of an EU battle group with the Slovaks, but that his party, ODS, would prefer to do this in

collaborations with the U.S. and NATO.

¶4. (C) MISSILE DEFENSE: Topolanek spoke of successfully persuading Jiri Paroubek, former Prime Minister and leader of the rival Social Democrats (CSSD) to drop his opposition to hosting a radar facility. He implied that there would be no opposition to a radar facility, at least at the leadership level, if the next government were to be some arrangement under which ODS and CSSD share power. Topolanek said a missile defense facility was one of his party's priorities, though he acknowledged that he could not be sure how long his party will control the government.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador asked whether Topolanek was concerned about decreasing military budgets, as measured by the percentage of GDP. The Prime Minister answered that he is very concerned about the downward trend of defense budgets over the last 3-4 years and the consequences if this continues for several more years. Nevertheless, Topolanek admitted that he would only be able to make minor changes for the time being. He predicted that if the trend isn't reversed, it will definitely have an effect on operational capacities, something he doesn't want to see. Topolanek said that the NATO Secretary General would be in Prague on October 30 and will want to address the issue.

¶6. (C) VISAS: Topolanek also raised the visa issue, calling it "the leitmotif that runs through all our interactions." Referring to his party's support for missile defense, and the deployment of Czech troops to places such as Afghanistan and Iraq, he said it is difficult to explain to Czech voters why the Czechs support initiatives that are perceived as largely American initiatives, when the U.S. has such an asymmetrical visa policy. Topolanek said he hoped that the Ambassador would, after the upcoming U.S. elections, get personally

involved in the Congressional lobbying effort recently begun by the V-4 plus Baltic states. The Ambassador assured Topolanek that he understood the importance of the issue.

¶7. (C) ENERGY SECURITY: Finally, Topolanek raised the issue of energy security and the potential threat that Russia will use its supply of gas and oil to demand political concessions from European nations. The Ambassador asked about diversification of energy sources and possible ODS support for nuclear power. Topolanek responded that ODS was struggling to diversify, and that there was so much opposition from the Austrians and the Greens that increasing the nation's use of nuclear power wasn't going to be easy. Topolanek expressed his alarm at talk of possibly reversing the flow of the Ingolstadt pipeline, and talk of adapting Czech refineries to take Russian crude. (NOTE: The Ingolstadt pipeline currently transports Norwegian and Middle East oil east to the Czech Republic via Germany. There are reported rumors that the Russians are pressuring the Czech Republic to become a transit country by reversing the pipeline's flow to allow Russian oil to flow west to Germany. End Note). Topolanek said the cold war is still being played out in the energy sector. He espoused the view that most international conflict, and even war, is somehow linked to a struggle over resources such as oil. Topolanek even went as far as to suggest that much of the recent "turbulence" in Central and Eastern Europe was too much to just be coincidence and that the Russians were somehow involved. He spoke, only half-jokingly, of a new type of Ribbentrop-Molotov pact under which Russia's influence would be extended through central Europe, eventually to the whole of the continent.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: Topolanek's party will hold its annual congress and elections for party leadership positions in Prague on November 17-18. ODS' undeniable victory in the local elections and the impressive showing in the first round of the Senate races October 20-21 have certainly strengthened Topolanek chances of staying in the top spot. In a September 21 farewell call by outgoing Ambassador William Cabaniss, days before Topolanek's government faced its confidence vote which it failed, Topolanek joked about his future as an ex-Prime Minister and hinted that he would like to visit the

U.S., as a tourist, early in 2007. In this week's visit, he was keenly focused on the many issues at hand and gave no sign that he might be leaving office soon. The meeting lasted for more than an hour and covered many issues on which the Czechs and the U.S. have, and could continue to cooperate on.

As this introductory call points out, Topolanek would be an excellent partner for the U.S. But it is still unclear whether the Ambassador will be paying another introductory call on a new Prime Minister in the months ahead. END

COMMENT.

GRABER